

iiS PRINCE BILLOW AND HIS
MEMOIRS

The years which it covers, 1903-9, embrace the first Morocco crisis, the naval rivalry with Great Britain, and the anxious months of the Bosnian crisis. Students of *Die Grosse Politik* find very little which they did not know, and Billow makes no serious attempt to rebut the charges of his critics. He continues to assert that his Moroccan policy was the only possible reply to the threatened repudiation of treaty rights, and claims that the Conference of Algeciras gave him the substance of his demands. Yet the guarantees which he secured merely retarded the process by which Morocco passed under the influence of France, and its main result was the cementing of the Entente. He depicts himself as urging Tirpitz and their common master during his last year of office not to antagonize England by forcing the pace of the *Flottenpolitik*, and blames them for resisting his advice; but he does not appear to realize that the estrangement had already taken place before his belated attempts to put on the brakes, and that the forces which he had helped to set in motion were almost certain to pass beyond his control. He dwells with special satisfaction on his handling of the Bosnian crisis, and claims with truth that he combined unflinching support of Germany's only reliable ally with the maintenance of European peace. He presents, however, only one side of the balance sheet, and omits to mention that the humiliation of Russian national sentiment in March, 1909, rankled on till 1914 and made it difficult, if not impossible, to give way when the Servian *protege* again appealed for help. The impression which the chapters on foreign policy in this volume are designed to leave is that the diplomatic position when the Prince surrendered the helm was relatively satisfactory, and that it was the fault of his successors

that the lights went out. For such complacency there is not the slightest excuse. Relations with Russia, France, England and Italy were demonstrably worse. The Triple Entente, which had been unthinkable in 1897, was a stark reality in 1909.

However disappointed we may be at the author's sketchy treatment of foreign affairs, we are compensated by the scintillating record of his partnership with the Kaiser and of the various stages of the breach. No such damning indictment has ever been made, for none of his chief servants enjoyed the same opportunities of intimate and continuous observation.

In length of service he was surpassed by Tirpitz, but the Kaiser never made the Admiral his personal friend. In the course of his reign he had two "favourites"—the expression is Billow's